# World Chronicle

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## WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The holding of the 1994 World Summit for Social Development in Denmark, with the presence of more than one hundred world leaders, was a United Nations landmark. Never before have themes like the eradication of poverty, full employment and the strengthening of social solidarity been discussed at such a high level. Since the Summit, countries and international organizations have responded to the commitments and the programme of action agreed by the national leaders at Copenhagen in many strategic and concrete ways, and significant progress is clearly occurring. In this edition of **World Chronicle,** Ms. Gloria Kan, Chief of Intergovernmental Policy Branch at the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs, discusses what has been the main achievements of the Social Summit and looks forward to a special session that will be held in June 2000 to review and appraise implementation of the outcome of the Summit.

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**ANNOUNCER:** From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

**WILLIAMS:** Hello, I'm Ian Williams, sitting in for Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

The World Summit for Social Development was held in March 1995 in Denmark. The Summit was the first international conference devoted to social development, and was attended by governments from 186 states. Three major goals were addressed and discussed by the world leaders: poverty eradication, expansion of productive employment, and social integration. The United Nations General Assembly decided that a Special Session will be held in June 2000 to review and appraise implementation of the outcome of the Summit. It will also consider further actions and initiatives towards full and effective implementation of the commitments agreed to at the Summit. As the number of people living in poverty increases worldwide, what can be done to make good the promises made by national governments five years ago in Denmark?

To discuss international social issues, our guest on **World Chronicle** today is Ms. Gloria Kan, Chief of the Intergovernmental Policy Branch at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Joining me to talk to Ms. Kan is Kristian Knutsen of *Yomiuri Shimbun* and Jack Freeman of the *Earth Times* .

Ms. Kan welcome to **World Chronicle.**

**KAN:** Thank you.

**WILLIAMS:** I understand the governments decided on ten priority issues and this sort of reminded me of the ten commandments which has been preached for 2000 years and ignored for 2000 years by most people. What action are you taking to ensure that the governments live up to all of the pious pledges that they made in Copenhagen five years ago?

**KAN:** Thank you. Maybe I should recall these ten commitments which were adopted in Copenhagen in 1995. You will see that it encompass a wide range of issues and it really gives a comprehensive picture of social development. The first one is creating and enabling environment for social development. Then we have eradication of poverty, promotion of full employment, promotion of full integration in societies and achievement of equality and equity between men and women. Then there is a commitment on access to health and education and one is devoted to the acceleration of development in Africa and the

Least Developed Countries, and then in terms of structural adjustment, the Summit called for the inclusion of social development goals in structural adjustment programmes.

**WILLIAMS:** Structural Adjustment Programmes are what the World Bank and IMF insist on for financial ...

**KAN:** Yes, exactly. We can talk a bit about that later. And then we have also looking for resources for social development – the effective allocation and also the increase in resources for social development. And lastly, they call for cooperation for social development at the international level. So essentially, it's international cooperation for social development.

**WILLIAMS:** So, what have the governments done, what have you done to ensure that the governments have lived up to their commitments?

**KAN:** Yes. Now, strictly speaking, four years have passed; next year will be the fifth year. There are implications and indications that we have seen of a direction in policy change in many governments. Of course, whenever there is a policy change it would take some time for the result to be filtered through and to be recognized, measured or concretely recognized. But there is a shift in many countries, many governments to, at least try to put social development at the centre of policy-making. And, you know, the Summit called -- the central message of the Summit is really to recognize the centrality of the human person in development. So that is a very powerful call and governments who were committed at the Summit. We have indication that many of them, not all of them, because there are constraints and obstacles to try to provide the direction in their policy.

**KNUTSEN:** So what would be on the agenda for the review conference? Will you be looking at new issues or just looking at how far you have come along since 1995?

**KAN:** The two major objectives of the Special Session -- one of course is review, review meaning we would like not just to see what governments have done. We would like to assess and identify obstacles, constraints and successes and lessons learned. So hopefully the Special Session will provide a forum for countries to share their views on what they have done or what they would like to have done and cannot be done. And then the second objective will be the identification of further initiatives. Now it is very important to bear in mind that there is a consensus agreement that Copenhagen – the commitments, the declaration and the programme of action – will not be reopened. They will not be renegotiated. So when we say we want to identify further initiatives, it is in those areas

where we feel that there is a lack of progress or there are very marked obstacles that deter governments from implementing the commitment of Copenhagen. So it is in those areas where we would like to identify and have strengthened action to extend further the commitments made at Copenhagen.

**FREEMAN:** You spoke of hopeful indications that policies are shifting in the right direction but isn't there a rather dire concern about the facts that are moving in the wrong direction? The fact that unemployment around the world is on the rise, poverty is on the rise, social disintegration is becoming more widespread and more violent and deadly.

**KAN:** Yes, indeed.

**FREEMAN:** How do you square those two?

**KAN:** I don't want to be too overly optimistic but there is a recognized shift at least the Summit – the biggest achievement of the Summit in my view is that social development has emerged as an issue, as a big issue, as a priority in policy-making. It generated universal awareness of such a thing called social development because it was a very difficult issue for the UN to have a conference. That's why governments were able to narrow it down to the three issues of eradication of poverty and enhancement of employment and social integration. Now, yes, there are actually there are more people living in abject poverty. I think I had a figure of three billion people living on under two dollars a day still worldwide. And unemployment is on the rise in many parts of the world and social disintegration is occurring because of many things. Actually, if you take the example of some of the countries in Asia, they were really on the right track. A big country like China for example, after the Summit, they adopted a plan – I think an 8-year social development plan – setting their own national target for reducing if not eliminating poverty in many of the rural areas of the country. And countries like Indonesia, for example, and Thailand, they were really taking it seriously but one thing that was unforeseen was the financial crisis. Here, I must point out that in the document of Copenhagen there was actually a foresight. The document mentioned in a paragraph on the functioning of the market, they mentioned that governments should be aware when to intervene in the market when they see that something is going wrong. But the fact that globalization was touched upon in the document but it was not extensively addressed because the crisis had really not happened but it happened in 1997. So those countries that really made steps forward unfortunately now have reversed. There are setbacks now and they have to really start again to put their policies back together

on track. And indeed, the whole process of implementation and assessment. It's a bit complicated and difficult because it is very uneven and the extent and also the capacity of different countries to be able to comply or to implement what they have committed has been very, very uneven and there is really a gap. So to answer your question yes, we have a sight of rosy picture that we feel that governments have really taken this seriously, on the other hand there are governments who do not have the capacity to even fulfill part of the agreement.

**WILLIAMS:** But are there any countries you could point to as countries as concrete examples where over the last five years they have done wonders and no beggar is on the streets, no homeless, and ...

**KAN:** Well, that is difficult to say. But for example we do get national reports from countries. Of course they are on a voluntary basis. After the Summit, the Secretary-General of the United Nations did immediately write to heads of state and government who were at the Summit and asking them, please you made this commitment, we would like very much if you could for example identify a focal point in your government and to inform us how things are going. So to give you an example, Ireland for example it is part of the European Union, it is a developed country and yet they came up with a very comprehensive anti-poverty strategy. And we were very happy to receive their report telling us that within their government, they have a ministry, they involve the private sector, they involve the civil society in their collaboration for strategies like that. And then Europe as a whole, for example, with regard to employment, I think they have adopted an employment strategy to counter the unemployment problem in Europe because in a few of the European countries, I think, unemployment has been a problem. And then, as I mentioned, for example in China, they have their own plan and then there are countries even like for example India, there is an attempt to inject what has been agreed in the policy. But as I said, policy takes a long time to take effect so out of the responses that we have to the Secretary-General's letters I would say the majority of them have indicated at least an attempt to go in that right direction.

**KNUTSEN:** I don't want to dwell on bad news but one of the commitments specifically targeted Africa as an area that needed help. As I understand it, since 1995 some indicators are now saying that in a number of African States, things are actually worse than they were in 1995. What will reviewers be doing to sort of re-invigorate that initiative directed at Africa?

**KAN:** Africa, I think, sort of did a bit better after the Summit and then because of the – there are many reasons why there is a setback. One of it is the fall in commodity prices and another one is the HIV/AIDS problem that affect – there are 25 countries that are most affected and the problem now is really the infection of the youth in Africa. So the government is really trying very hard to cope with that kind of problem. As a matter of fact, the UN HIV/AIDS programme has identified seven co-sponsors which are all from the UN system including WHO, UNDP, UNESCO, to try to help those countries to counter – that is now one of the preoccupying problems in Africa. In our recent session of the Preparatory Committee, Africa was actually singled out as the continent that really needed the most help and of course there is the problem of the debt and the Structural Adjustment Programmes which many African countries are struggling with. So all these have been addressed and will be addressed, we hope, at the Special Session. But during this process, Africa has really been recognized as the continent that needs help especially in social development.

**WILLIAMS:** This is **World Chronicle.** Our guest is Gloria Kan, Chief of the Intergovernmental Policy Branch of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. I'd like to pick up from there because, of course, the IMF the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and the others are special agencies of the United Nations and they're pledged to combat poverty but if I remember the figures from a year or two ago, they were taking a billion more in interest out of Africa than they were putting back in aid in loans. This doesn't seem very conducive to solving poverty since it's the poor who has to suffer from these transactions?

**KAN:** One of the further initiatives that we hope that will come out of the Special Session is precisely to look at the way Structural Adjustment Programmes are designed and prescribed. One of the proposals that will come out first of all is for the Bank and the Fund to do an assessment of really what are the impact of Structural Adjustment Programme on social development in those countries because the social cost has been too high in the name of reform, in the name of having the programme. Another proposal is to involve the national governments at the very inception of the programme so they could participate in the design and maybe those governments could identify where are the priorities to sort of improve the programme. Now I must say that the World Bank has become a bit more socially conscious. Mr. Wolfensohn had sort of proposed this ....

**WILLIAMS:** Mr. Wolfensohn is the Head of the World Bank.

**KAN:** .... the Comprehensive Development Framework, put that on the table and there's a lot of social development elements in that. So there is room for improvement, I think a lot of room for improvement, and this is precisely one of the further points that we hope to pursue and we hope that the Special Session will give a mandate to the Bretton Wood Institutions -- the Bank and the Fund – to look into that.

**FREEMAN:** You mentioned that the purpose of this Special Session would be to review progress rather than renegotiating the outcome of the Summit five years ago, but that's been the goal of all the five-year reviews and they've all run into big difficulty as you found out in the Preparatory Committee meeting recently when agreement could not be reached on what the topic should be. What can you do to keep from re-opening?

**KAN:** I think we will just have to impress on governments and negotiating partners of each of the groups that it is really going backwards to reopen everything. We have to sort of generate the sense of a forward looking Special session and we have really been working very hard on that. Recently, at the Prep Com, we already have a draft outcome of the Special Session and the proposal of the Chairman is really to have three parts. The first part is precisely a very strong reaffirmation of what heads of state and government have agreed in Copenhagen. So that went through very well actually in the Preparatory Committee. Then the second part is review and assessment. Now at this stage we cannot have a full-fledged review because we have sent out questionnaires and guidelines to all governments to ask them to provide us with their own assessment of the implementation and that is not due until the end of this month. So by the end of the year, by the second Prep Com next year, we will be in a position to have a very deep assessment. Then the third part is exclusively devoted to further initiatives and any initiative we hope that merely a repetition of what was agreed in Copenhagen, we hope that they will not be endorsed. It can be on the same subject but it has to be a strengthened initiative or a new initiative altogether. I can give you an example. There is an area of calling for the social responsibility of businesses which has been really lacking since Copenhagen. It was not specifically mentioned in Copenhagen, but Copenhagen did call for the involvement of all actors and all sectors of society to implement what has been agreed. So one of the initiatives that came out of the Preparatory Committee which was not a formal contention at all was the social responsibility of businesses and the private sector. So this is one example that was barely mentioned but

now it has been strengthened and called for. So we hope we will have more initiatives like that by June next year.

**KNUTSEN:** On the private sector you just mentioned, are we getting any indications yet or are you still waiting for the all national implementation reports to come back but that the growth of the private sector, its expansion, is it doing things in terms of poverty eradication, providing jobs. Are we seeing that?

**KAN:** Yes. I don't know whether you remember the Secretary-General's statement at Davos earlier this year in Switzerland at the World Economic Forum and this is one of the priorities, I believe, of the United Nations now is to involve the private sector. It's because of the -- I don't like to use the word "power" – but there is a lot of power involved and also a lot of the resources are in the hands of private businesses. And we feel that to effectively carry out the mandate given by the Summit be it poverty eradication, be it employment, social integration, we need help, really tremendous help, from the private sector. So we are trying our best at the Secretariat to approach the private sector and also I think it is going to be one of the major themes or items in Geneva next year. The government of Switzerland is very, very eager to also promote this fact of the social responsibility of the private sector so there will be parallel events being held in Geneva next year to try to bring the businesses together and to have some kind of a sense of how they would like to get involved or how they should get involved

**FREEMAN:** Well, there's a big difference between governments getting – rather between businesses getting involved in whatever way they see is socially responsible and governments which have a commitment to live up to the covenants that they signed. You could be cynical and say that no you wont be cynical and say that, well you're just sloughing this off onto business because they've got the money. Well we don't want to do, we can't afford to do. Is that a reasonable charge?

**KAN:** No, that's really not the intention at all. It is constantly recognized in the Summit document and in all the ultimate resolutions adopted by the General Assembly that the responsibility for implementing the Copenhagen outcome rests with national governments. Of course, international cooperation is essential. Now within the national governments, within each country, governments have to draw on the health – the assistance, the resources, of the civil society, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, the academics, you name it. It's up to the government. But they are becoming a major player in

social development and I think we need to recognize that. So it doesn't mean that government will just wash their hand and not do anything --" oh, you take over". No, that is not the intention at all. We believe that the government still has ultimately the power to call the shots or to involve whoever they like to involve with the help of other people. The private sector was not as prominent four years ago when Copenhagen was convened but it's within the last four years that it has emerged as a dominant force. So I think it is time to involve them.

**WILLIAMS:** But what happens when you get to -- I saw in one of your documents, one of the claims from the United States, for example in reducing unemployment was their welfare reform at and I have seen many series in newspapers like *The New York Times* that have said what this in fact does drive people off the welfare rolls into total poverty, not into paid employment. Now what happens when you get a government that claims as an achievement something which its own people say isn't? What power do you have over the governments that you say have power?

**KAN:** Well, we don't have really as the United Nations, we really don't have any power over governments. All we can do is to provide the forum for governments to come together and then the United States can share its own experience and then another country can kind of "Well, but that's not what we intend to do. We do this, this, this, to try to achieve what we do". So that's all we can do is to provide a forum for them to talk it out. But of course, each national government has to decide on their own policies in different areas.

**KNUTSEN:** Five years ago, you were able to attract more world leaders than into any other gathering ever and you -- and the attention was certainly on issues at hand. How do you maintain that interest, that focus and also what kind of turnout do you expect for the review conference?

**KAN:** Yes, at Copenhagen, we had 117 heads of state and governments and I think a total of 186 governments were represented so that was really a record especially for a conference on social development. A lot of people were rather confused before that. They didn't know what it was about it . And we hoped that the momentum will be kept up. Every year, at the General Assembly, the item comes up in the plenary and governments do come and exchange views and tell us what they are doing. Now with the process of the Preparatory Committee and also we have another forum which is called the Commission for

Social Development, it's a functional commission of ECOSOC. So we have four .....

**WILLIAMS:** Economic and Social Council.

**KAN:** Yes, the Economic and Social Council, sorry. We have four chances to bring governments together to remind them what is going to happen in June. From all indications, the interest has been very high. For example, the recent Preparatory Committee, the level of participation where a lot of ministers from governments came from Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of even Finance, Ministry of Labour, so we're hopeful that the Special Session will have a good result.

**WILLIAMS:** Ms. Kan, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us in this edition of **World Chronicle.** Our guest has been Gloria Kan, Chief of the Intergovernmental Policy Branch of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. She was interviewed by Kristian Knutsen of *Yomiuri Shimbun* and Jack Freeman of the *Earth Times.* I'm Ian Williams sitting in for Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle.**